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## Viewing cable 07BOGOTA923, VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS ON

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#07BOGOTA923**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07BOGOTA923	2007-02-08 19:18	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Bogota

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.elespectador.com/wikileaks>

VZCZCXYZ0018  
PP RUEHWEB

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ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2584  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 000923

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/07/2017

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SUBJECT: VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS ON  
ATLANTIC COAST LEADS GOC TO REVIEW PROTECTION MEASURES

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer. Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) On January 31, unknown gunmen killed human rights activist Yolanda Izquierdo, who had been warning the GOC of death threats against her. The killing followed violence, threats, and arson against other groups involved with human rights, displaced persons, and paramilitary victims' rights on the Atlantic coast. In reaction, President Uribe sent a senior police official to lead the investigation into the Izquierdo murder, vowed that the assets of 2,600 demobilized paramilitaries be frozen, and announced a 50 million peso (23,000 USD) reward for information on the killing. The GOC is reviewing its protection programs to improve security for threatened individuals. End Summary.

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GUNMEN KILL ACTIVIST FOR PARAMILITARY VICTIMS  
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¶2. (U) On January 31, unknown gunmen killed human rights activist Yolanda Izquierdo outside of her home in Monteria, Cordoba Department. Izquierdo was a leader of the Popular Housing Organization (OPV), a group that assists Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to reclaim land seized by paramilitary groups. Izquierdo served as one of two leaders of a delegation of victims who attended the voluntary confession (version libre) of ex-para chief Salvatore Mancuso. Izquierdo reportedly began receiving death threats after attending Mancuso's version libre in December 2006. She subsequently requested protection from the Prosecutor General's Office, the local Human Rights Ombudsman, and the Administrative Department for Security (DAS), but never received protection measures. Minister of Interior and Justice (MOIJ) Carlos Holguin, whose ministry runs a protection program for threatened individuals, blamed a "bureaucratic error" for Izquierdo's lack of protection. Human rights groups charged Izquierdo's murder was designed to intimidate victims prepared to testify against paramilitary leaders in the Justice and Peace Law process.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS ON ATLANTIC COAST  
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¶3. (U) There have been other cases of threats and violence against human rights activists on the Atlantic Coast. On January 28, unknown gunmen killed Freddy Abel Espitia, president of the Committee of Displaced Persons of Cotorra, in Cordoba Department. On January 20, a suspected arsonist burned down a community center of the League of Displaced Women (League) in Turbaco, Bolivar Department. Both the League and the Cartagena Office of the Association for Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) had reported threats declaring their organizations "military targets" of newly emerging criminal groups. The GOC increased police patrols around the League and AFRODES's offices after the Embassy brought the threats to its attention, but the patrols did not protect the League's community center.

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GOC REACTION  
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¶4. (C) The day after Izquierdo's murder, President Uribe announced a 50 million peso (23,000 USD) reward for information on the perpetrators, vowed to freeze the assets of all 2,600 demobilized paramilitaries participating in the Justice and Peace Law process, and appointed the homicide chief of the Judicial Police (DIJIN) to personally lead the investigation. Head of the Presidential Program on Human Rights Carlos Franco told us February 1 the GOC is providing protection to Izquierdo's OPV colleague, as well as OPV's lawyer (see septel). DIJIN Chief General Naranjo told us February 6 the DIJIN had identified Sor Teresa Gomez as the intellectual author of Izquierdo's murder and that a warrant has been issued for her arrest. The DIJIN expects to detain

Gomez shortly, and is also close to identifying the murderers. He confirmed that pursuant to Uribe's order, the DIJIN seized assets belonging to Mancuso. Naranjo cautioned, however, that additional seizures would be slow due to legal and resource constraints.

15. (C) Similarly, two days after the January 20 fire at the League of Displaced Women, the GOC convened an interagency

security meeting with League XXXXXXXXXXXX, local authorities, law enforcement, the military, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the MOIJ's protection program. The GOC offered to rebuild the damaged building, construct a police box next to the League's grounds, set up a Marine command post in the neighborhood, and provide private security guards at the site. XXXXXXXXXXXX told us February 2 she had rejected the GOC offer to rebuild the building, accepting an offer from the local UN Office of the High Commissioner on Refugees to do so instead. She attributed the fire to local political leaders, including Turbaco Mayor Silvio Carrasquilla, who feared that her work with the women's group threatened their political control. The League has been a recipient of USAID funding through a housing project for displaced women. XXXXXXXXXXXX also recently presented a funding proposal to USAID for the League's human rights-related activities.

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VIOLENCE TO HASTEN PROTECTION PROGRAM REFORM?  
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16. (SBU) Franco told us the violence has triggered a GOC review of its methods of assigning and providing protection to threatened individuals. Currently, the Colombian National Police (CNP) provides bodyguards to around 2,000 threatened individuals and the DAS safeguards 600-700 journalists, union leaders, human rights activists, and other vulnerable individuals with funding provided by the Ministry of Interior and Justice's Protection Program (MOIJ). The MOIJ program also provides threatened individuals with transportation, communication equipment, bullet proof vests, and/or armored offices. The National Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalia) protects a small number of witnesses, and the military also runs a small protection program. The DAS has proposed shifting its bodyguard duties to the CNP, but Minister Holguin has not yet approved the move. In total, more than 8000 individuals benefit from GOC protection programs.

17. (C) Franco said the current system is overly bureaucratic and does not provide broad enough coverage. The agencies involved do not share threat information, and the risk assessment process is too time-consuming. He said the Fiscalia's witness protection program is grossly understaffed, and cannot protect the large number of witnesses expected to testify in the Justice and Peace Law process. Similarly, the MOIJ is overly narrow and is not designed to protect all witnesses or victims. Franco said the GOC is looking to better integrate the different protection programs to provide more complete coverage. In the short-term, it will expedite the dissemination of threat information within the GOC, with an emphasis on making such information available to local CNP commanders. DAS Director Andres Penate also told us the DAS will commit to conducting rapid investigations of threats, believing this will help deter violence against threatened individuals.

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EMBASSY ACTIONS  
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18. (SBU) The Embassy alerted the Presidential Program on Human Rights and the MOIJ's protection program of the threats against the League and AFRODES on January 11 after receiving a letter from U.S.-based human rights groups. Both programs promised to review the security schemes for AFRODES and the League and to notify the local CNP office. The MOIJ had been already providing limited protection measures to the League. After the fire, we stressed the need for a thorough investigation--as well as for additional protection

measures--to Franco, Penate, and the Cartagena office of the Fiscalia. We also met with League XXXXXXXXXXXX and visited the AFRODES office in Cartagena. We supported XXXXXXXXXXXX's request to select her own personal security detail, and the GOC agreed to pay for it. XXXXXXXXXXXX asked that we follow-up on the arson case; we committed to send a Poloff to Cartagena in early March to visit the League's office and discuss the case with local officials.

19. (SBU) We did not receive information about the threats against Izquierdo prior to her killing, but met subsequently with Franco, Penate, and Naranjo to highlight the need for the GOC to identify and punish those responsible for her death. We will also continue to work with the GOC to improve protection for witnesses, human rights activists and other threatened individuals.

DRUCKER

=====CABLE ENDS=====